596 expenses, or taxes, of the family members and to see to it that their immediate personal needs in food and clothing are taken care of. His supervisory activity takes up so much time that he sometimes does not take an [462] active part in the field labor. Nevertheless, it is his privilege as gazda to initiate every important male activity, the selection of seed, the plowing, sowing and harvesting. He consumes the first and choice bite of every product and is the first to use new equipment, even the new dishes. In vineyard areas he runs the cellar and distributes the wine. Undisputed master at home, the gazda is also the high priest of the family, officiating at many superstitious ceremonies aimed at the assurance of a plentiful crop.

Upon the death of the head of the household, his heirs may split the family farm or they may elect to stay together, in which case a new gazda is chosen among them.

596 562 The wife of the master, the gazdasszony, is second in rank, as is clearly indicated by her functions in several superstitious practices. [783] For example, on Christmas Eve, the gazda lights a fire in the out-buildings in order to purify them, while the gazdasszony feeds the animals. Depending upon the region, she may or may not lose her prerogatives after the death of her husband and the election of a new gazda. If she dies first, the gazda

783 Spring has arrived, and therefore people are filled with thoughts about the fate of the crops. Will there be a revival of nature, will there be a renewal of everything, will there be a good harvest, fertility? ... Let everything be refreshed and cleaned ... They dust, mend, whitewash, scrub, wash; men clean themselves, animals are bathed, even the soul is spring cleaned, this being the period of industrious confessing ... Everything is resplendent with cleanliness. According to a popular song even the raven washes her son on Good Friday ...

783 883 In old Hungarian calendars the second day of Easter is called «Ducking Monday», because on this day it was the custom to throw the girls into water and duck them. Now-a-days the custom is much milder, as the girls are no longer thrown into water; the lads merely lay them in the trough and refresh them with a few buckets of water so that if they marry they may become bright women. And if we add, that in some districts all this happens at the creak of dawn, it is evident that the custom is a fairly drastic one for girls even at present! Where the custom is even milder, the girls are only dragged to a well, and they pass the ceremony of the katharsis at the expense of a few buckets of water. This is well worth their while, because lovely flowers thus watered will certainly not wither away.

Not only must the girls put a good face on their enforced early morning bath, they must even pay for it: with rolls, a glass or two of brandy, in most places with a few painted eggs. These may be boiled or raw, and in Hungarian they are called «red eggs» as they are mostly painted red.

775 The egg has a manifold symbolic meaning, dating from ancient, even pre-historic times: in the latter it had a realistic religious meaning. In pre-historic tombs egg

574 But never mind that ! Time is getting on, therefore let us drink Saint John's grace, and take our leave with the words of the feasters of the Great Plain :

Dear host, we are already off,
We thank you for your kindness,
And beg to leave you . . .
We have had enough
Our your food and drink,
That is why we sing hallelujah !
May God give you a good night,
You and your household,
And all your guests who are leaving !

The whipping of the Innocents

●783 That is what the custom of December the 28th is called, as in most places in Hungary people whip each other on this day, though usually the men or boys whip the women. The whip itself is made of willow-twigs, but sometimes a beribboned birch twig is also used for the purpose ! The victim is supposed to become fresh, healthy and free of carbuncles. According to the ancient rite lazy wives and lazy maids get on that occasion what they would have deserved anyhow. Sometimes they get it as early as dawn, in bed, so that the whipping shall be all the more effective. The whipping lasts as long as the oration which accompanies it. For a wife it is often sufficient to say «be fresh, and next time don't answer back», but a lazy daughter or maid servant gets a much longer peroration : «you shall be fresh, healthy, you shall have no carbuncles ; if you are sent down, you shall go up, if you are sent up, you shall go down, if you are sent for water, bring wine ; if you are sent for wine,

bring water, and get married soon !» It is much more difficult to suffer so many good wishes ... Because the whip is spicy, like mustard ; the Szekler whipping starts with the saying : — «I have brought a little mustard seed, may I sow it ?» — Of course permission is always granted ! In other places they ask : — «How many Innocents are there ?» — And they whip as long as their victim guesses the right answer : — «Hundred-fourty-four-thousand !» 783

Whipping, like so many other customs, also occurs here and there amongst the many hollidays of the Calendar, and amongst the other customs designed to conjure up health, plenty and fertility. In one Hungarian district the whippers, who are here called «slappers», squat in the middle of the room, strike the earth, and meanwhile wish the host a hundred golden florins, the hostess a bag full of coins, a portion of grease as big as a table, a piece of lard as big as the door, and naturally that the hens shall lay eggs ! — In a few places the «bethlehem» visit is also included into this game, by reciting just a few of its verses.

That the custom is of pagan origin is best proved by the fact, that the Church fathers took the matter up at the Synod of Nantes, and unanimously prohibited the whipping of women as a pagan custom unworthy of Christians ...

It is all the more obvious that it is a pagan custom, as in Ovid we find a description of how married women had themselves beaten on the feast of Faunus Lupercalia for the sake of fertility and purification. This feast — the Lupercalia — was on the 15th of February, at the beginning of spring. In Hungary it also happens occasionally that whipping takes place at Easter with budding twigs, but it has also occurred that birch twigs were made to bud for the whipping of December ... A bud is the symbol of fertility.